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Description

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to a prosthesis, more specifically an artificial bone connection prosthesis used for the replacement of damaged bones, an articular cartilage such as a coxa and a knee joint, and a spine's intervertebral disc.

In the disclosure described below, the invention relating to the articular cartilage is described as a first invention and the invention relating to the intervertebral discs is described as a second invention.

2. Prior Art

At present, even if an articular cartilage is partially damaged, it is replaced with an artificial articular cartilage since there is no appropriate surgical treatment method. The artificial articular cartilage is greatly beneficial to patients who are suffering from joint trouble. However, serious problems, such as complications caused by the replacement of artificial joints, in particular a high occurrence rate of loosening problems and the necessity of another operation due to the breakage of the bones around the artificial joints.

The artificial joints which are currently used are made of hard materials such as metals and ceramics and a soft socket made of ultra-polymer high-density polyethylene (HDPE). This HDPE is superior in wear resistance, but it is inferior in wear resistance and shock absorbing performance for impact load. Reaction of foreign matter caused by powder generated due to wear is also causing problems.

An articular cartilage is located on the surface of a bone joint. The articular cartilage of the knee joint or coxa of a human being is 2 to 4 mm in thickness. The articular cartilage absorbs shock applied by the weight of the human being and distributes and transmits the impact load to a chondral cancellous bone trabeculation to play an important role of allowing smooth movability under low friction. One of the most important features of the articular cartilage is its high extracellular water content, 60 to 80%. The elasticity and lubrication of the articular cartilage are brought by this high water content.

So far, various materials, such as HDPE, polyhydroxyethyl methacrylate (PHEMA) gel, silicone and polyvinyl alcohol (PVA) gel, have been examined as the materials for the artificial articular cartilage, but they were insufficient in their dynamic characteristics.

The materials of the artificial articular cartilage must meet the requirements listed below:

- i) Superior affinity to a human body
- ii) Chemical and physical stability
- iii) Superior dynamic characteristics (wear resistance, shock absorbing effect, lubrication, etc.)

As described above, conventional artificial articular cartilages have drawbacks in characteristics regarding lubrication, shock absorbing and wear resistance.

On the other hand, an intervertebral disc is located between individual vertebral bodies. More specifically, two vertebral bodies and an intervertebral disc located therebetween comprise a motion segment: a function unit at the spine. The disc comprises sturdy fiber rings which surround the outer circumference of the nucleus pulposus made of fiber cartilage with alternately arranged collagen fiber bundles, liquefied soft nucleus pulposus which holds the tension state of the intervertebral disc made of colloidal gel including much glycosaminoglycan bonded to water, and the end plate of cartilage which is made of glassy cartilage and is used to separate the vertebral body from the above-mentioned elements.

In our daily life, the intervertebral disc is subjected to complicated load which is a combination of compression, bending and distortion. When the spine is bent forward, stretched and bent sideways, stresses, in particular, tension and compression stresses occur on the disc. When the spine is turned, shearing stress occurs on the disc. The load applied to the nucleus pulposus in the intervertebral disc is uniformly distributed in a normal case and exerts force hydrostatically. Therefore, the intervertebral disc has a hydrostatic function at its motion segment. The disc thus has very important roles; it functions as a cushion between vertebral bodies, stores energy and absorbs shock of load by distributing the load. In addition, the disc is greatly related to the internal stability together with ligaments.

If the intervertebral disc having the above-mentioned important functions is damaged by a disease such as the hernia of the intervertebral disc, the damaged disc is treated as described below at present. The deformed intervertebral disc is taken out first. Then, a self transplantation bone, bone cement or an artificial vertebral body spacer is mainly used to fix the portion between the vertebral bodies.

However, all means, including the self transplantation bone, artificial vertebral body made of stainless steel, alumina ceramics and hydroxy apatite, bone cement made of polymethyl methacrylate or a combination of these, are used

only to fix the connection between vertebral bodies without considering the dynamic characteristics inherent to the intervertebral disc of a living body. The flexibility and shock absorbing function inherent to the intervertebral disc are disregarded. In particular, the upper and lower sections adjacent to the intervertebral disc are adversely affected in the living body dynamics, thereby frequently causing secondary problems at the sections adjacent to the intervertebral disc.

In addition to the above-mentioned technologies practiced actually, the prior arts disclosed so far are: "Artificial vertebral body spacer" (Japanese Provisional Patent Publication No. 64-76851) comprising a metal mesh unit with an elasticity close to that of the bone and being characterized in the method of fixing the unit to the upper and lower vertebral bodies, "Artificial intervertebral disc for a cervical vertebra (Japanese Provisional Patent Publication No. 63-164948) attaching importance to the motion of the intervertebral disc, "Artificial vertebral body" (Japanese Provisional Patent Publication No. 63-300758) aiming for substitution of the dynamic characteristics of the intervertebral disc. "Artificial intervertebral disc capsule and its embedding method" (Japanese Provisional Patent Publication No. 64-70041) and "Intervertebral disc prosthesis" (Japanese Provisional Patent Publication No. 2-215461).

The various artificial intervertebral discs devised so far are only artificial vertebral body spacers used just to substitute self transplantation bones and had no dynamic characteristics of the intervertebral disc of the living body, or have insufficient internal stability as a result that too much importance is placed to mobility. Even composite body discs aimed to substitute the dynamic characteristics of the intervertebral disc, made of flexible polymer material mainly at the inner sections and comprising hard materials, such as ceramic powder material or bioinactive fibers, at the sections contacting bones cannot sufficiently substitute the softness and shock absorbing function of the intervertebral disc of the living body, cannot be sufficiently fixed to the bones or cannot have sufficient mechanical strength of itself. In this way, these composite body discs cannot satisfy the above-mentioned overall functions at the same time as artificial intervertebral discs.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The object of the first invention is to obviate the defects in the materials for the above-mentioned conventional artificial articular cartilages, that is, to improve the dynamic characteristics of an artificial articular cartilage and for connecting and fixing the artificial articular cartilage to the tissue of a living body.

The object of the second invention is to eliminate the problems in the above-mentioned conventional intervertebral discs.

The concepts of the first and second inventions are common in that the hydrogel of polyvinyl alcohol is used to improve the dynamic characteristics of the prosthesis and that the hydrogel is also used, in combination with ceramics or metallic porous bodies harmless to the living body, as a carrier to allow ingrowth and ossification of the bone tissue of the living body to improve the connection and fixation to the living tissue. The hydrogel of PVA is combined with the porous body and positioned at the dynamic interface between the living bones to provide excellent lubrication and shock absorbing characteristics. On the other hand, the tissue of the living body grows and ossifies into the porous body so that the prosthesis can achieve affinitive connection to the tissue of the living body. In this way, the prosthesis of the first invention has a significant adaptability as an articular cartilage and the prosthesis of the second invention also has a significant adaptability as an intervertebral disc.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Fig. 1 is a schematic view illustrating the artificial articular cartilage of the first invention installed in a living body.

Fig. 2 is a schematic view illustrating the artificial intervertebral disc produced as an example of the second invention;

Figs. 3 (a) to 3 (e) are schematic views illustrating the artificial intervertebral discs of examples of the second invention;

Fig. 4 is a view illustrating the installation condition of the artificial intervertebral disc of the second invention inside the human body;

Fig. 5 (a) is a view illustrating a PVA hydrogel model of an example of the second invention and Fig. 5 (b) is a view illustrating an ultra-polymer polyethylene model of an example of the second invention, and;

Fig. 6 is a graph illustrating secular changes in the stresses obtained during experiment 1 using the examples of the second invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

The inventors of the present invention earnestly studied to provide a prosthesis with excellent lubrication and shock absorbing characteristics of the articular cartilage of a living body and to make the prosthesis securely fixed to the tissue of a living body. As a result, the inventors have found that the above-mentioned objects can be achieved by combining PVA hydrogel with porous ceramics or titanium mesh, which are superior in affinity with the bones of a living body. More specifically, in the case of the artificial articular cartilage of the first invention, PVA hydrogel is carried via

infiltration and fixation in part or most of the pores in the porous alumina ceramics or titanium mesh. By this method, the dynamic secure fixation is made between the members to be connected. In addition, the tissue of the living body ossifies into the non-infiltration/fixation section of the PVA hydrogel, thereby achieving secure connection and fixation as well as dynamic stability and adaptability to the living body for an extended period of time.

The artificial articular cartilage of the first invention is produced by the method described below. A PVA solution with a polymerization rate of 1700 or more and a saponification rate of 99.5 mol % is carried via infiltration in part or at an end of the porous alumina ceramics or titanium mesh. The solution is then subjected to a gelatinization process and set to gel at low temperature. The PVA is then dried and heat-treated at a high temperature between 120 and 180°C.

With the artificial articular cartilage produced as described above, the PVA hydrogel functions as the articular cartilage of the living body, and the porous alumina ceramics or titanium mesh assures connection and fixation between the tissue of the living body and the PVA hydrogel.

The first invention will be specifically described below.

The PVA used with the present invention should have a saponification rate of 95 mol % or more, preferably 97 mol % or more, most preferably 99 mol % or more. If the saponification rate is lower than those values, the gel is apt to have less strength. The average polymerization rate should be 1700 or more at an average viscosity, preferably 3300 or more. As the polymerization rate becomes lower, the strength of the gel also becomes lower. The starting material of the PVA should be subjected to molecular distillation to prevent PVA with low molecular weight from eluting.

When the PVA solution is obtained, only water can be used as solvent. However, it is preferable to use solvent mixed with organic solvent which is affinitive to water. Examples of the organic solvents affinitive to water are dimethyl sulfoxide (DMSO), ethylene glycol (EG), glycerol (GC), propylene glycol (PG), propylene alcohol (POH), ethyl alcohol (EOH), 1, 3-dimethyl-imidazolinone (DMI). The solvent can be a mixture of two or more types.

With the present invention, it is preferable to select DMSO from among the above-mentioned organic solvents by considering the solubility to the PVA, the ratio of mixture with water and the drop of the freezing point.

The mixture ratio between water and the above-mentioned solvent can be determined as desired, but normally should be in the range of 5:95 to 95:5.

In the present invention, the PVA solution is first adjusted and prepared. Its concentration should be in the range of 2 to 30 weight % depending on the desired strength and water content. To adjust and prepare such a solution, PVA is generally heated and dissolved. Only heating while stirring is possible or dissolution is possible by using an auto-clave or a microwave oven.

The completely dissolved PVA solution is then carried via infiltration into the porous alumina ceramics or titanium mesh. In order to carry the PVA hydrogel via fixation only at the desired portions, cyanoacrylate (instantaneous adhesive) or gelatin is filled in the portions where the living body tissue is desired for ossification. After the fixation, the PVA solution is carried via infiltration and left at low temperature less than room temperature. The solution is set to gel, thereby making an artificial articular cartilage made of the PVA hydrogel. In the process, the solution is set to gel in a shorter period of time as the temperature is lower. The process should thus be conducted in a freezer at a temperature of -10°C or less, preferably -20°C or less.

The obtained PVA gel comprising a large amount of water and organic solvent is dried and heat-treated at high temperature. This heat treatment process can be done in the air, but preferably be conducted in vacuum, nitrogen gas flow or silicone oil. The heat treatment temperature should be 100°C or more where the crystallization of the PVA can be promoted, preferably 120 to 180°C. The sufficient heat treatment time is normally 1 to 10 hours depending on the heating temperature.

Since the water content of the PVA hydrogel artificial articular cartilage made as described above can be greatly changed between 10 to 60 weight %, the desired dynamic characteristics can be obtained by adjusting the water content.

Fig. 1 is a schematic view illustrating the artificial articular cartilage (for a coxa) of the first invention installed in a living body. An articular cartilage C of the present invention is embedded in recess R disposed at the top end of femur F. PVA hydrogel g of the articular cartilage C is disposed to fit for cartilage C' of the living body. Porous alumina ceramics C1 with no hydrogel g is embedded in subchondral bone F1 of femur F.

The second invention:

To eliminate the defects of the above-mentioned intervertebral discs, the inventors of the present invention studied and experimented variously. Consequently, the inventors provide an artificial intervertebral disc comprising a pair of metallic or ceramic porous bodies and a polyvinyl alcohol hydrogel block incorporated therebetween.

(Examples)

The first and second inventions will be described further taking examples. However, the technical concepts of the present invention are not limited only to the examples.

(Example 1: corresponding to the first invention)

(Preparation and adjustment of a PVA solution)

5 10 g of PVA with a polymerization rate of 5000 and a saponification rate of 99.9 mol % was added to 90 g of dimethyl sulfoxide/water mixture solvent (8:2 weight ratio) and dissolved at 130°C while stirred by a magnetic stirrer for two hours to obtain a solution.

(Fixation of the PVA hydrogel to the porous alumina ceramics)

10 Cyanic acrylate (instantaneous adhesive) was carried via infiltration and fixation beforehand at about half of the entire length of a cylindrical alumina ceramic body (porosity 40%) measuring 5 cm in diameter and 10 cm in height. The ceramic body was then immersed in the above-mentioned PVA solution and the PVA solution was carried via infiltration in the alumina ceramic body by removing gas from the ceramic body by using an aspirator. The ceramic body was then
15 left for 24 hours in a freezer at -20°C to set the PVA to gel. As a result, the PVA gel was carried by fixation in the alumina ceramics.

(Heat treatment of the PVA hydrogel)

20 To remove infiltrated and fixed cyanic acrylate and DMSO (solvent) from the above-mentioned alumina ceramics/PVA hydrogel composite body, the composite body was cleaned in acetone at 50°C for three hours. The composite body was then dried for 24 hours at room temperature by wind and with a vacuum drier. The dried PVA hydrogel was heat-treated in silicone oil at 140°C for one hour to obtain PVA hydrogel with low water content.

This PVA hydrogel was immersed in water at 37°C for three days to obtain an equilibrium condition. The saturated
25 water content rate of the obtained gel was about 20 weight %.

(The shearing and peeling strength of the PVA hydro gel)

The shearing and peeling strength of the alumina ceramics/PVA hydrogel composite body was about 3 MPa when
30 measured with the S-100 Auto-graph made by Shimazu Seisakusho Ltd.

(Embedding the cartilage into the knee joint of a rabbit)

The PVA hydrogel artificial articular cartilage made as described above was cut and formed into a cylinder of 4 mm
35 in diameter and 4 mm in height. The knee joint of a rabbit was unfolded by cutting the para-patellar median patella skin under "Nembutal" intravenous anesthesia. The femoropopliteus surface was drilled to the subchondral bone. The above-mentioned artificial articular cartilage was then embedded into the obtained hole.

As a comparison example, an ultra-polymer polyethylene piece (HDPE) used at the socket section of the currently used artificial articular cartilage was also embedded in the same way. Three rabbits were used for each material.

40 Two weeks after operation, no inflammation was found at the degenerated synovial membrane of the cartilage of all groups. In histology, immature scar tissue was generated and a few inflammation cells were found partially. However, the degree of the inflammatory cellular infiltration was low for both materials. Significant differences were not recognized between the two materials.

Four weeks after the operation, inflammation reaction disappeared from around the materials and the maturity of
45 the scar tissue was recognized.

Eight weeks after the operation, the maturity of the scar tissue made gradual progress for all materials. In the case of the artificial articular cartilage made of PVA hydrogel fixed alumina ceramics, bone ossification occurred at the portions of the alumina ceramics with unfixed PVA hydrogel, and the ossified bone was firmly fixed to the joint. On the other hand, the artificial articular cartilage made of HDPE dropped easily from the joint.

50 The artificial articular cartilage of the first invention has the superior dynamic characteristics equivalent to those of the articular cartilage of the living body, that is, the characteristics similar to the lubrication and shock absorbing characteristics. In addition, the artificial articular cartilage can assure firm fixation to the bones of the living body. Consequently, the artificial articular cartilage can be used as the cartilage of the knee joints and coxae. Therefore, since the artificial articular cartilage has the excellent joint characteristics inherent to the living body, it is greatly beneficial to the
55 welfare of the human being.

(Example 2: corresponding to the second invention)

PVA with a polymerization rate of 11,000 and a saponification rate of 99.9 mol % was added to dimethyl sulfoxide

(DMSO)/water mixture solvent (8:2 weight ratio) to set the PVA concentration to 5 weight %. The PVA solution was then dissolved and prepared in a constant-temperature oil bath (including ethylene glycol) at 135°C for seven hours while being stirred by an electric stirrer.

The PVA solution used in this case should have a saponification rate of 95 mol % or more, preferably 97 mol % or more. If the saponification rate is less than the above-mentioned values, the gel to be obtained has less strength. The average polymerization rate should be 1700 or more at the average viscosity, preferably 5000 or more. If the rate is less than the values, the polymerization rate of the PVA lowers and the gel to be obtained has less strength. The starting material of the PVA should be used after molecular distillation to prevent PVA with low molecular weight from eluting.

When the PVA solution is obtained, only water can be used as solvent. However, just as in the case of the first invention, it is possible to use one or a mixture of two or more solvents described before and listed as follows: dimethyl sulfoxide (DMSO), ethylene glycol (EG), glycerol (GC), propylene alcohol (POH), ethyl alcohol (EOH), 1, 3-dimethyl-imidazolizone (DMI).

Just like the first invention, it is preferable to select DMSO from among the above-mentioned organic solvents by considering the solubility to the PVA, the ratio of mixture with water and the drop of the freezing point.

The mixture ratio between water and the above-mentioned solvent can be determined as desired, but normally should be in the range of 5:95 to 95:5.

Its concentration should be in the range of 2 to 30 weight % depending on the desired strength and water content. To prepare and adjust such a solution, PVA is generally heated and dissolved. Only heating while stirring is passable or dissolution is possible by using an auto-clave or a microwave oven.

Two pieces of rectangular-column pure titanium fiber mesh (porosity about 50%) measuring 20 x 20 x 8 mm were preformed. One piece of the pure titanium fiber mesh was set on the bottom of a metal mold (prepared separately) and the adjusted PVA solution was poured into the mold. The PVA solution was covered with the other piece of the pure titanium fiber mesh. Immediately after compression by using a press molding machine took place on the laminate, the temperature of the PVA solution was lowered by using an instantaneous cooling spray to carry PVA hydrogel via infiltration only in the desired portions inside the upper and lower fiber mesh pores. In this case, cyanic acrylate or gelatin can be filled beforehand in the portions where biologic fixation due to ingrowth and ossification of the living body tissue is desired, to carry the PVA hydrogel via infiltration and fixation only at the desired portions so that the PVA solution can be carried via infiltrated after solidification. At this time, the PVA solution which is not carried via infiltration into the above-mentioned fiber mesh can exist independently between the upper and lower fiber mesh bodies.

The pieces of the mesh bodies were then left for 24 hours in a freezer at -20°C to set the PVA solution to gel. The PVA hydrogel in the upper and the lower pure titanium fiber mesh bodies is fixed to obtain a block of the PVA hydrogel. In this case, the solution is set to gel in a shorter period of time as the temperature is lower. Therefore, a freezer was used at a temperature of -10°C or less, preferably -20°C or less. The amount of the PVA solution should be determined beforehand so that the PVA block with a desired thickness can be formed.

To remove DMSO which was used as a solvent, two pieces of the pure titanium fiber mesh/PVA hydrogel block composite bodies were infiltrated in ethyl alcohol and cleaned about one week while heating and stirring. The pieces of the composite bodies were then dried for three days at room temperature by wind and with a vacuum drier. The dried composite bodies were heat-treated in silicone oil at 140°C for three hours. This heat treatment process can be done in the air, but preferably be conducted in vacuum, nitrogen gas flow or silicone oil. The heat treatment temperature should be 100°C or more where the crystallization of the PVA can be promoted, preferably in the range of 100 to 180°C. The sufficient heat treatment time is generally 1 to 72 hours depending on the heat treatment temperature. The time can be made longer.

In the end, the pieces of the composite bodies were immersed in water. In this way, the two artificial intervertebral discs were obtained which were similar in shape to that shown in Fig. 2 and were composed of the pure titanium fiber mesh body and PVA hydrogel block.

Figs. 2 and 3 are schematic views of artificial intervertebral discs of the second invention. In the figures, numerals 1 and 11 represent pure titanium fiber mesh bodies positioned over and under the artificial intervertebral disc. Numeral 22 represents a PVA hydrogel block. Numerals 3 and 33 represent PVA hydrogel infiltration portions of the pure titanium fiber mesh bodies. While numerals 4 and 44 represent the hydrogel non-infiltration portions.

The pure titanium fiber mesh bodies 1 and 11 were firmly connected and fixed in the condition where the PVA hydrogel from the PVA hydrogel block 22 had entered via infiltration part or most of the block 22. In this case, to make the connection firmer, a collar or a projection (both not shown) can be provided at the ends of the PVA hydrogel infiltration portions 3 and 33 so that an anchoring effect is offered.

Like the artificial intervertebral disc shown in Fig. 3 (a), the block 22 made of the PVA hydrogel has wing sections projecting right-and-left or back-and-forth to provide a larger area for contacting the end plates of the upper and lower neighboring vertebral bodies, thereby allowing such load distribution as can be obtained by the intervertebral disc of the living body. The block 22 is desired to have an anatomical sectional shape close to the end plate to enhance the internal stability of the artificial intervertebral disc when installed. The shape of the artificial intervertebral disc of the second invention is not limited to a rectangular column, but can have a shape of a triangular column, an elliptic cylinder, a cir-

cular cylinder or an irregular shape depending on the shape of the installation position, as shown in the schematic views of Figs. 3 (b) to 3 (e). The above-mentioned titanium fiber mesh bodies 1 and 11 can be composed of porous ceramic bodies, metallic mesh bodies or metallic porous bodies such as metallic beads, which are affinitive to the living body. In this case, the porous body of the second invention can be made of alumina, zirconia, hydroxy apatite or crystallized glass ceramics. The metallic porous body can be made of titanium-based alloy, cobalt-chrome alloy or stainless steel, which are affinitive to the living body. Furthermore, the above-mentioned pure titanium fiber mesh bodies 1 and 11 can be a combination of ceramic or metallic porous bodies described above. The porosity of the porous bodies is desired to be in the range of 20 to 90%. In the example of the second invention, two porous bodies are provided over and under the above-mentioned block. However, porous bodies provided back-and-forth and right-and-left as stoppers and integrated with the above-mentioned block can also be used. Accordingly, the number of porous bodies of the artificial intervertebral disc of the second invention is not limited to two.

The water content of the PVA hydrogel of the porous body/PVA hydrogel block composite body made by infiltrating water in the end can be changed greatly in the range of 10 to 60 weight % depending on the heat treatment condition of the composite body so that the water content suited for the desired dynamic characteristics can be adjusted and obtained. When this artificial intervertebral disc was immersed in water at 37°C for a week until its equilibrium condition was obtained, the saturated water content of the block made of the PVA hydrogel was about 14 weight %.

Fig. 4 shows an actual installation condition of the artificial intervertebral disc of the second invention which is similar to that shown in Fig. 3 (a). In this case, the non-infiltration portions 4 and 44 of the PVA hydrogel of the pure titanium fiber mesh bodies 1 and 11 directly contact the bones of the upper and lower vertebral bodies 5 and 55, thereby achieving biological fixation by ingrowth and ossification of bones into the porous interior of the non-infiltration portion mentioned above.

Next, some experiments were conducted to examine the characteristics of the artificial intervertebral disc of the second invention produced by the above-mentioned method.

Experiment 1

A PVA solution of 4 weight % was prepared and adjusted by using the preparation method for the above-mentioned artificial intervertebral disc and a circular cylindrical PVA hydrogel 6 measuring 6 mm in diameter and 3 mm in height was made [Fig. 5 (a)]. The water content of the gel was about 16 weight %. Fig. 5 (a) shows a PVA hydrogel model sample made by laminating a circular cylindrical pure titanium fiber mesh body 7 (porosity about 50%) measuring 6 mm in diameter and 6 mm in height and cancellous bone section 8 obtained from the knee joint of a pig and formed in a circular cylinder measuring 6 mm in diameter and 3 mm in height over and under the above-mentioned PVA hydrogel block 6. Fig. 5 (b) shows an ultra-polymer polyethylene model sample made by laminating an ultra-polymer polyethylene body 9 (6 mm in diameter and 5 mm in height, a bone cement piece made of polymethyl methacrylate (6 mm in diameter and 4 mm in height) and the above-mentioned cancellous bone section 8 (6 mm in diameter and 3 mm in height).

A weight of 2.7 kg was dropped from a height of 50 mm to each sample in physiological saline solution. The stress transmitted through each sample was measured with the passage of time by using a load cell installed under each sample. Fig. 6 shows the results of the measurement. According to the graph, a shock load was transmitted for an extended period of time in the case of the PVA hydrogel model sample. It was thus confirmed that the PVA hydrogel model sample was superior in shock absorbing performance.

Experiment 2

Just as in the case of the first experiment, a PVA solution of 4 weight % was prepared and adjusted. Four pieces of circular cylindrical pure titanium fiber mesh bodies measuring 8 mm in diameter and 20 mm in height with porosity values of 50 and 70% (two pieces for each type) were also produced. Cyanic acrylate was infiltrated and fixed in the section at about half length of each piece. The PVA solution was pressed and infiltrated by using an injection syringe. The following treatment methods were the same as those for the first invention, except that heating and cleaning in acetone were added before cleaning in ethyl alcohol to remove infiltrated and fixed cyanic acrylate. Just as in the case of the first invention, the pure titanium fiber mesh/PVA hydrogel block composite bodies were made. The water content of the block comprising the PVA hydrogel was about 16 weight % just as in the case of experiment 1.

The PVA hydrogel block composite bodies were trimmed in a size of 5 to 6 mm in diameter and subjected to a shearing force test by using an auto-graph universal tester made by Shimazu Seisakusho Ltd. Table 1 shows the results of the measurement.

Table 1

Test factor Sample	Contact area (mm ²)	Load (kgf)	Shearing stress MPa
Sample 1 (porosity 50%)	24	3.5	1.4
Sample 2 (porosity 50%)	20	3.2	1.6
Sample 3 (porosity 70%)	28	6.1	2.1
Sample 4 (porosity 70%)	28	5.4	1.9

The average shearing stress of the composite bodies with 50% porosity was 1.5 MPa and that of the composite bodies with 70% porosity was 2.0 MPa. The composite bodies with higher porosity delivered higher shearing stress. Since the maximum shearing force applied to the thoracic and lumbar vertebrae of a human being is said to be 150 N, it is assumed that at least the maximum shearing force of 0.375 MPa is applied to the connection area (20 x 20 = 400 mm²) of the pure titanium fiber mesh/PVA hydrogel block composite body of example 1. It is clear that the shearing forces of the composite bodies of the present example are far greater than the maximum value. Therefore, it is proved that in the artificial intervertebral disc of the second invention, the connection between the PVA hydrogel block 22 and porous bodies can be firmly secured via infiltration and fixation in part or most of the pores of the ceramic or metallic porous bodies positioned over and under the PVA hydrogel block 22.

Experiment 3

A PVA solution of 4 weight % was prepared and adjusted by the above-mentioned production method of the artificial intervertebral disc of the second invention. Pure titanium fiber mesh/PVA hydrogel block composite bodies (water content about 16 weight %) were made by using a circular cylindrical pure titanium fiber mesh body measuring 5 mm in diameter and 10 mm in height and with 70% porosity. The composite bodies were embedded in the patellar groove of the femurs of mongrel dogs. They were killed with the passage of time and the operation sections were examined histologically.

Two weeks after the operation, immature scar tissue was generated and a few inflammation cells were found partially. However, the degree of infiltration was low. Four weeks after the operation, the inflammation reaction around the sample disappeared. As the scar tissue became matured, the ingrowth of new bones into the pores of the pure titanium fiber mesh body was recognized. The new bone trabeculation became matured with the passage of time. Eight weeks after the operation, the composite body was firmly fixed to the base of the bone. Therefore, it was proved that the fixation to the living tissue was achieved by the ossification of the living tissue to the hydrogel non-infiltration portions of the porous body located over and under the PVA hydrogel block, and the dynamic stability and affinity to the living body were made excellent for an extended period of time.

In the end, an experiment similar to experiment 3 was conducted by using porous bodies made of alumina measuring 5 mm in diameter and 10 mm in height and with 70% porosity. The results of the experiment were excellent just like those of the above-mentioned experiment results.

The artificial intervertebral disc of the second invention has characteristics similar to the dynamic characteristics: flexibility and shock absorbing characteristics of the living body. In addition, it offers firm connection and fixation to living bones. Its composite body has high connection strength applicable to actual use. Therefore, the disc can be used as an artificial intervertebral disc which is an important element of the spine. The disc can thus substitute for the excellent intervertebral disc of the living body, thereby greatly contributing to the welfare of human being.

The above descriptions are made of the first and second inventions directed to an artificial cartilage and artificial intervertebral discs. However, it could be understood from the above descriptions that the present prosthesis is also applicable to a prosthesis for replacement of damaged living bones.

Claims

1. A prosthesis for use in replacing at least one of a damaged bone, an articular cartilage and an intervertebral disc, characterised in that the prosthesis comprises:

polyvinyl alcohol hydrogel and a porous body, the porous body comprising at least one of a ceramic material and a metallic material, wherein

the hydrogel is carried selectively into the porous body by infiltration and fixation such that porous parts remain in desired regions of the body, and also the hydrogel is available for surface contact in use at the interface between the resulting at least partially infiltrated porous body and articular bone portions to function as the articular cartilage, and in use the porous parts permit bone tissue to grow into and ossify within the said porous parts of the body to connect the hydrogel to natural bone portions of a living body.

2. A prosthesis according to claim 1 wherein the prosthesis provides artificial articular cartilage comprising a polyvinyl alcohol hydrogel having a degree of polymerisation of 1700 or more and a saponification degree of 99.5 mol % or more.
3. A prosthesis according to claim 2 wherein the water content of the polyvinyl alcohol hydrogel is in the range of from 10 to 60%.
4. A prosthesis according to any one of claims 1 to 3 wherein the porous body comprises a titanium mesh.
5. A prosthesis according to any one of claims 1 to 3 wherein the porous body comprises alumina ceramic having a porosity of from 20 to 80%.
6. A method of producing a prosthesis of the type claimed in claim 1, particularly an artificial articular cartilage, wherein the method is *characterised by* the step of contacting an alumina ceramic porous body or a metallic mesh with a polyvinyl alcohol solution to cause at least a part of said body or mesh to become infiltrated by said solution, and setting that solution at a low temperature to form a hydrogel.
7. A method according to claim 6 further *characterised by* firstly treating the porous body or metallic mesh, at least in part at selected regions where ossification by natural tissue ingrowth is desired in use, with a fixative to control the infiltration of polyvinyl alcohol solution, and subsequently drying the hydrogel formed from the set polyvinyl alcohol solution and heat-treating it at a temperature in the range of from 120 to 180°C.
8. A prosthesis according to claim 1 wherein the prosthesis provides an artificial intervertebral disc and is *characterised in that* it comprises a pair of porous bodies (1, 11), of metal or ceramic, and a polyvinyl alcohol hydrogel block (22) integrally incorporated therebetween.
9. A prosthesis according to claim 8, wherein the polyvinyl alcohol hydrogel block is attached to the respective porous bodies by infiltration and fixation thereof within regions (3, 33; 4, 44) of said bodies.

Patentansprüche

1. Prothese zur Verwendung beim Ersetzen mindestens eines der folgenden Elemente: ein beschädigter Knochen, ein Gelenkknorpel und eine Zwischenwirbelscheibe bzw. Bandscheibe, dadurch gekennzeichnet, daß die Prothese die folgenden Merkmale aufweist:

ein Polyvinylalkohol-Hydrogel und ein poröser Körper, wobei der poröse Körper von keramischem Material und Metallmaterial mindestens eines aufweist, worin das Hydrogel selektiv in den porösen Körper durch Einsickern und Fixierung so eingetragen ist, daß poröse Teile in gewünschten Bereichen des Körpers verbleiben und auch das Hydrogel für die Oberflächenberührung bei der Verwendung an der Übergangsfläche zwischen dem resultierenden, mindestens teilweise getränkten, porösen Körper und Gelenkknochenabschnitten zur Verfügung steht, um als Gelenkknorpel zu wirken, wobei bei der Verwendung die porösen Teile es Knochengewebe gestatten, einzuwachsen und innerhalb der genannten porösen Teile des Körpers zu verknöchern, um das Hydrogel mit den natürlichen Knochenabschnitten eines lebenden Körpers zu verbinden.
2. Prothese nach Anspruch 1, worin die Prothese für einen künstlichen Gelenkknorpel sorgt, der ein Polyvinylalkohol-Hydrogel mit einem Polymerisationsgrad von 1700 oder mehr und einem Verseifungsgrad von 99,5 Mol-% oder mehr aufweist.
3. Prothese nach Anspruch 2, worin der Wassergehalt des Polyvinylalkohol-Hydrogels im Bereich von 10 bis 60% liegt.

4. Prothese nach irgendeinem der Ansprüche 1 bis 3, worin der poröse Körper ein Titangitter aufweist.
5. Prothese nach irgendeinem der Ansprüche 1 bis 3, worin der poröse Körper ein Aluminiumoxid-Keramikmaterial mit einer Porosität von 20 bis 80% aufweist.
6. Verfahren zum Herstellen einer Prothese der in Anspruch 1 beanspruchten Art, insbesondere eines künstlichen Gelenkknorpels, worin das Verfahren **gekennzeichnet** ist durch den Schritt, einen porösen Körper aus Aluminiumoxid-Keramikmaterial oder ein Metallgitter mit einer Polyvinylalkohollösung in Berührung zu bringen, um es zu verursachen, daß mindestens ein Teil des genannten Körpers oder Gitters mit der genannten Lösung getränkt wird und diese Lösung bei niedriger Temperatur verfestigen zu lassen, um ein Hydrogel zu bilden.
7. Verfahren nach Anspruch 6, ferner dadurch **gekennzeichnet**, daß man zuerst den porösen Körper oder das Metallgitter mindestens in dem Teil an den ausgewählten Bereichen, wo die Verknöcherung durch Einwachsen natürlichen Gewebes im Gebrauch erwünscht ist, mit einem Fixativ behandelt, um das Einsickern der Polyvinylalkohollösung zu steuern, und daß man nachfolgend das aus der verfestigten Polyvinylalkohollösung gebildete Hydrogel trocknet und es bei einer Temperatur im Bereich von 120 bis 180°C wärmebehandelt.
8. Prothese nach Anspruch 1, worin die Prothese für eine künstliche Zwischenwirbelscheibe bzw. Bandscheibe sorgt und dadurch **gekennzeichnet** ist, daß sie ein Paar poröser Körper (1, 11) aus Metall oder Keramikmaterial sowie einen Polyvinylalkohol-Hydrogelblock (22) aufweist, der zwischen diesen integriert aufgenommen ist.
9. Prothese nach Anspruch 8, worin der Polyvinylalkohol-Hydrogelblock an den jeweiligen porösen Körpern durch sein Einsickern und Befestigen innerhalb von Bereichen (3, 33; 4, 44) der genannten Körper angebracht ist.

Revendications

1. Prothèse destinée à être utilisée pour remplacer au moins l'un des éléments constitués par un os endommagé, un cartilage articulaire et un disque intervertébral, caractérisée en ce que la prothèse comprend :
un hydrogel d'alcool polyvinylique et un corps poreux, le corps poreux comprenant au moins l'une des matières constituées par une matière céramique et une matière métallique, l'hydrogel étant déposé d'une manière sélective dans le corps poreux par infiltration et fixation d'une façon telle que des parties poreuses subsistent dans des zones voulues du corps, et l'hydrogel étant aussi disponible pour un contact de surface en cours d'utilisation à l'interface entre le corps poreux obtenu, au moins partiellement infiltré, et des parties d'os articulaire, de façon à jouer le rôle du cartilage articulaire, tandis qu'en cours d'utilisation, les parties poreuses permettent à du tissu osseux de croître dans lesdites parties poreuses du corps et à s'y ossifier, de façon à relier l'hydrogel à des parties d'os naturel d'un corps vivant.
2. Prothèse selon la revendication 1, dans laquelle la prothèse fournit du cartilage articulaire artificiel comprenant un hydrogel d'alcool polyvinylique ayant un degré de polymérisation de 1 700 ou davantage et un degré de saponification de 99,5 moles % ou davantage.
3. Prothèse selon la revendication 2, dans laquelle la teneur en eau de l'hydrogel d'alcool polyvinylique est comprise entre 10 et 60%.
4. Prothèse selon l'une quelconque des revendications 1 à 3, dans laquelle le corps poreux comprend un produit maillé en titane.
5. Prothèse selon l'une quelconque des revendications 1 à 3, dans laquelle le corps poreux comprend une céramique d'alumine ayant une porosité de 20 à 80%.
6. Procédé de réalisation d'une prothèse du type revendiqué à la revendication 1, en particulier un cartilage articulaire artificiel, selon lequel le procédé est caractérisé par les opérations consistant à mettre un corps poreux en céramique d'alumine ou un produit maillé métallique en contact avec une solution d'alcool polyvinylique, de façon à provoquer une infiltration d'au moins une partie du corps ou du produit maillé par la solution, et à faire prendre cette solution à une faible température de façon à former un hydrogel.
7. Procédé selon la revendication 6, caractérisé en outre par les opérations consistant d'abord, au moins en partie

dans des zones sélectionnées dans lesquelles une ossification par croissance interne de tissu naturel est souhaitée en cours d'utilisation, à traiter le corps poreux ou le produit maillé métallique au moyen d'un agent de fixation, de façon à régler l'infiltration de solution d'alcool polyvinylique, puis à faire sécher l'hydrogel formé à partir de la solution d'alcool polyvinylique ayant pris et à le soumettre à un traitement thermique à une température comprise entre 120 et 180 °C.

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8. Prothèse selon la revendication 1, dans laquelle la prothèse fournit un disque intervertébral artificiel et est caractérisée en ce qu'elle comprend deux corps poreux (1, 11), en métal ou céramique, et un bloc d'hydrogel d'alcool polyvinylique (22) inséré entre ces corps de façon à former un seul ensemble.

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9. Prothèse selon la revendication 8, dans laquelle le bloc d'hydrogel d'alcool polyvinylique est rendu solidaire des corps poreux respectifs par infiltration et fixation de ce bloc dans des zones (3, 33 ; 4, 44) desdits corps.

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FIG. 1

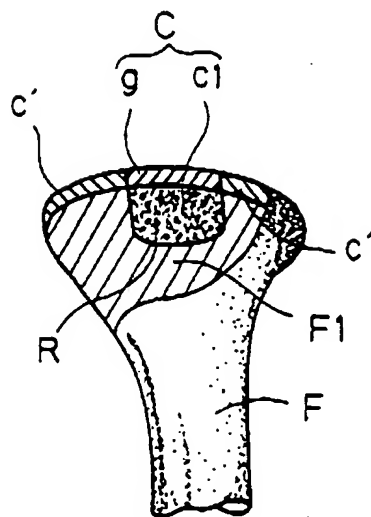


FIG. 2

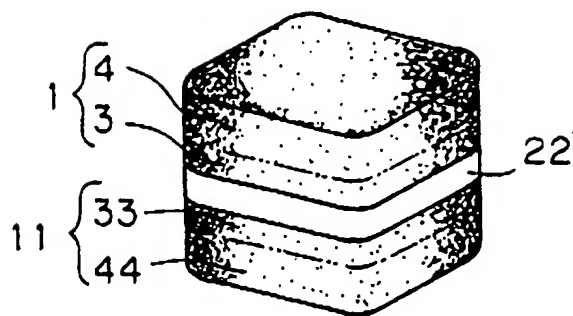


FIG. 3

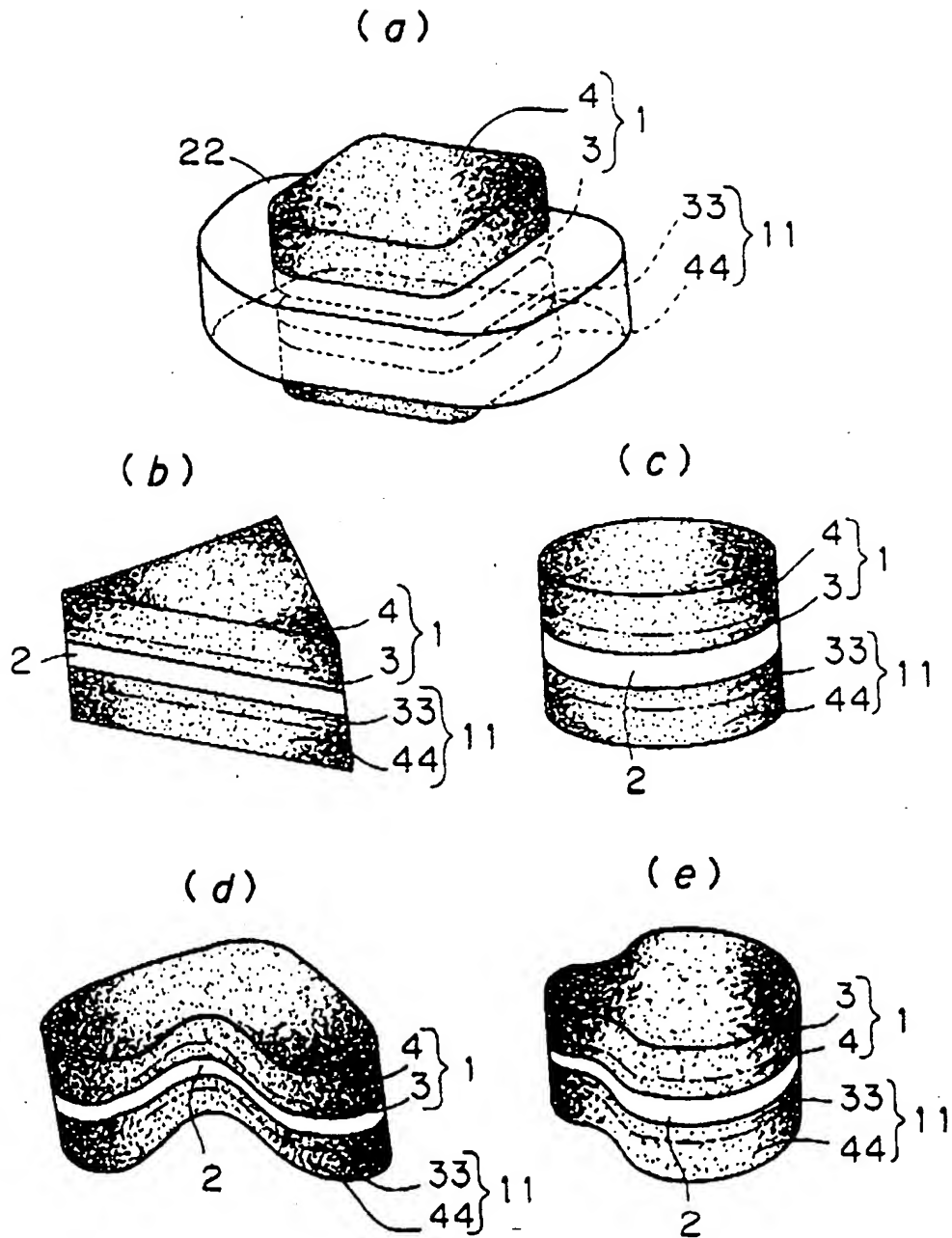


FIG. 4

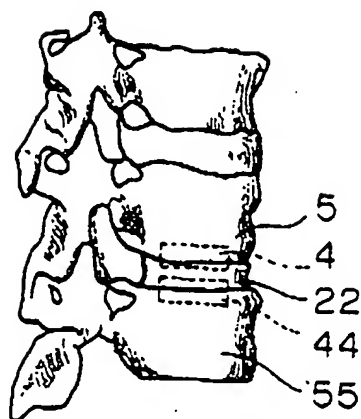


FIG. 5

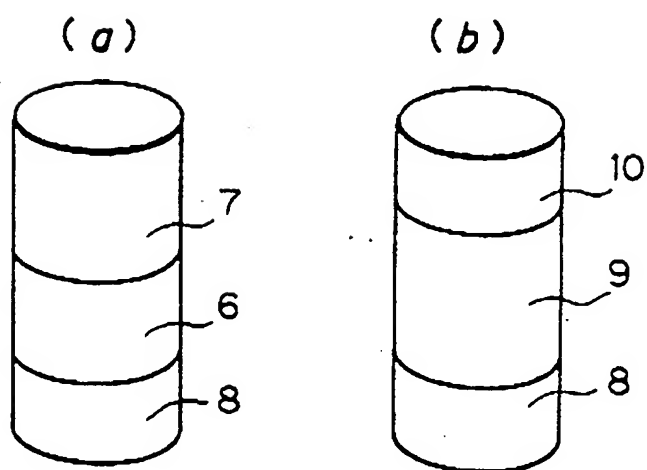


FIG. 6

